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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Israel: Netanyahu Government
- [1](#)2. Mideast
- [1](#)3. Afghanistan

Key stories in the media:

Electronic media reported that at noon today a terrorist carried out

an attack at the settlement of Bat Ayin (Gush Etzion), armed with an axe. A 13-year-old boy was killed and a 7-year-old boy was wounded. The details of the assault are still unclear.

Leading media reported that yesterday President Obama called PM Benjamin Netanyahu to congratulate him on his new position and to reaffirm America's steadfast commitment to Israel and its security. Israel Radio reported that Netanyahu received an invitation from the President and that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke with incoming Israeli FM Avigdor Lieberman and that they agreed to meet soon.

All media led with FM Lieberman's aggressive remarks at the handover ceremony from outgoing FM Tzipi Livni. (Yediot bannered his storming in.) He emphasized that the new government is not bound by the Annapolis process. Lieberman was quoted as saying: "If you want peace, prepare for war." Leading media reported that, after Lieberman ended his remarks, Livni told him: "You've convinced me that I was right not to join the government." The Jerusalem Post reported that Egypt will boycott Lieberman unless he apologizes for previous statements he made. The Jerusalem Post reported that Lieberman tried to get off on the right foot with Cairo, praising it as an important stabilizing factor in the region. Haaretz reported that, speaking to the newspaper yesterday, Lieberman tried to tone down his rhetoric slightly. "I am committed to the Roadmap of 2003 as approved by the Israeli cabinet," he said. "I voted against it, but it is a cabinet resolution and I am bound by it." He added that the new U.S. administration itself no longer talks about the Annapolis process. "I propose following the Roadmap, phase by phase," he said. "I recently went quite far with my remarks, even saying that I was willing to leave my home at the Nokdim settlement if there was a cabinet resolution on the issue, but we can't give all this up for nothing, and there must be reciprocity." Haaretz quoted Mike Hammer, a spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, as saying: "The President has said many times that we are committed to the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace and security."

The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that yesterday PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa urged Netanyahu to accept the two-state solution. Media quoted President Shimon Peres as saying at the changing of the guard ceremony that Netanyahu should accept the Arab peace plan as proposed by the Arab League in Beirut in 2002. Haaretz reported that the Netanyahu government could face EU sanctions over the two-state issue as early as this month.

Israel Radio quoted Defense Secretary Robert Gates as saying in an interview with The Financial Times that he does not believe that Israel will attack Iran this year. The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East, told the Senate's Armed Services Committee that when it comes to its nuclear activity, Tehran's "obstinacy and obfuscation have forced Iran's neighbors and the international community to conclude the worst about the regime's intentions." He said that could cause Israel to take matters into its own hands.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli defense establishment officials as saying yesterday that Muslim political parties in India as well as Russian and American defense corporations are suspected of working behind the scenes to torpedo a \$1.4 billion deal signed recently between Israel Aerospace Industries and India for the development of a missile defense system.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the PA issued yet another warning to Palestinians against selling their homes or properties to Jews, saying that those violating the order would be accused of high treason - a charge that carries the death penalty.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the resignation of PA Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad may affect U.S. aid to the PA.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Israel welcomed the U.S. decision to seek a seat on the UN Human Rights Council in elections next month, even as some U.S. Jewish groups were wary of the move.

The Jerusalem Post cited the satisfaction of Israeli Arabs and minority rights activists over the choice of Labor MK Avishay

Braverman as minister without portfolio for minorities. However, the need for the post itself was questioned.

HaQaretz and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Wafa Younis, a musician from northern Israel who founded a youth orchestra in the Jenin refugee camp, was arrested there on Tuesday by Fatah militants and sent back to Israel from the West Bank. Last week the orchestra played for Holocaust survivors and elderly Arabs in Holon, news that ignited passions in Jenin.

I. Israel: Netanyahu Government:

Summary:

Columnist and Channel 2-TV anchor Yair Lapid wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QAt the very least, we ought to give Netanyahu a chance to fail before we declare that he has failed.

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QLieberman may have trashed Annapolis, but by saying that the Roadmap obligated him, he was at the same time accepting a two-state solution. The ultra-Orthodox HamodiQa editorialized: QEven if truth is wholly on LiebermanQs side, it doesnQt always have to be told, in particular to foreign nations and statesmen.

Block Quotes:
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I. QGood Luck, Bibi

Columnist and Channel 2-TV anchor Yair Lapid wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/2): QI wonder what happens to a politician who has been given a last chance, and he reads time and time again in the newspaper that there is no way that he can succeed. At the very least, we ought to give Netanyahu a chance to fail before we declare that he has failed. Tom Stoppard, the playwright, once wrote: QIt's not the voting that's democracy, it's the counting.Q The Netanyahu government might not be the government that I would have wanted, but there are good and experienced people in it (as well), and it was legally elected. Our fate does not depend on whether we succeed in ousting it swiftly from office but, rather, on whether it is successful. One of the necessary conditions for its success is that we sincerely wish it good luck, and that we truly mean it too.

II. "AvigdorQs Accent, ArikQs Voice"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/2): QSomething [was] very much evident at the Foreign Ministry yesterday, and that was a return to the pre-disengagement policies of former prime minister Ariel Sharon. What did Lieberman essentially say? He said disengagement was a failure, as was Annapolis, as were all the generous concessions former prime minister Ehud Olmert said he offered the Palestinians over the past two years. Lieberman said none of that moved peace any closer, but rather pushed it all farther away. But he did pledge allegiance to the Roadmap, saying that this is a document that is binding on the government. And what is the official name of the road map? Interestingly enough, it is called QA Performance-based road map to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.Q Lieberman may have trashed Annapolis, but by saying that the Roadmap obligated him, he was at the same time accepting a two-state solution, because that is where the Roadmap leads. But, again sounding like Sharon, Lieberman said that the Roadmap must be adhered to by the letter, and it must be implemented phase after phase. What this means is that negotiations for a final agreement are to take place at the end of the Roadmap, not at the beginning: not before terrorism is eradicated, not before Palestinian institutions are created, not before the Palestinians show real security capabilities. Lieberman, in a move that does not seem to have been coordinated with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, ditched the diplomatic framework of the past two years in favor of one adopted by Sharon in 2003.

III. "Superfluous Statements"

The ultra-Orthodox HamodiQa editorialized (4/2): Q[IsraelQs] Jewish population voted in mass -Q much more than the parliamentary majority that includes minorities Q- against the Left. But even if truth is wholly on LiebermanQs side, it doesnQt always have to be told, in particular to foreign nations and statesmen who donQt have a positive view of the Jewish community in the Holy Land.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QThis kind of [Israeli] attack in Sudan, if it took place, is an attack made in desperation, an attack of no choice, an attack by those left on their own.

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QOne cannot shake the impression that the swift probe [into Operation Cast Lead offenses] and its findings are part and parcel of the IDF's and Israeli society's campaign of psychological repression.

Block Quotes:

QNo Reason to Celebrate

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/2): QIf the report about the Air Force's bombing raid in Sudan is correct, then this is bad news, and it is completely unclear why anyone in Israel is rejoicing over it. Here, the farther away a military operation is, the greater the joy. Why is this bad news, despite the courage and daring involved in attacking distant targets? Because it means that we did not succeed, either during Operation Cast Lead or after it, to accomplish anything in the international, diplomatic, or psychological-deterrence sphere that would prevent continued arms smuggling to Gaza.... This kind of attack in Sudan, if it took place, is an attack made in desperation, an attack of no choice, an attack by those left on their own. There is a big difference between blowing up a nuclear reactor in Syria and bombing a convoy in Sudan. There, it was a strategic attack, since constructing a nuclear reactor is an enormous amount of work, particularly when the eyes of the world are turned toward Syria -- but to take out another convoy? Easy as can be. This pinpoint destruction shows that a flood of arms is still flowing into the Gaza Strip.

II. "Repression Campaign"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/2): QThe rapid investigation of testimony from Operation Cast Lead veterans who told of the killing of civilians, vandalism of property, and use of phosphorus bombs in Gaza shows that the military justice system can act quickly under public pressure.... The defense establishment was quick to rejoice at the closure of the case and the conclusion that soldiers had told tall tales or embellished unfounded rumors that they had heard elsewhere. The defense minister and the chief of staff repeated the cliched statement that the IDF is the Qmost moral army in the world.Q It is difficult to accept this. If the ranks of the combat units are filled with liars and exaggerators, then the IDF has a serious discipline, if not moral, problem. One cannot shake the impression that the swift probe and its findings are part and parcel of the IDF's and Israeli society's campaign of psychological repression.... If the IDF aspires to be the most moral army in the world, it must Qlook the truth in the eye,Q in the words of Ehud Barak's election campaign, and genuinely and courageously probe the reasons for the killing of many QnoncombatantsQ during the fighting in Gaza. It ought to punish those who deviated from their superior's commands and it must define rules of engagement that, above all, will ensure the protection of innocent individuals and their property.

13. Afghanistan:

Summary:

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QObama will have to decide very soon which of [Iran or Saudi Arabia] will be able to help more effectively in the war in Afghanistan

Block Quotes:

"The Great Satan Courts the Axis of Evil"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the

independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/2): QAfghanistan is gradually getting out of control.... Iran is willing to cooperate with the U.S., but not without a price. After helping the administration of George W. Bush in the war in Afghanistan, and wielding its influence to advance the appointment of Karzai, it was dubbed a charter member of the Qaxis of evilQ in return. This time Iran is being more cautious. In exchange for cooperation, it will demand a change in American policy toward it, beyond the Nowruz holiday greeting sent by Obama. Iran, after all, has tremendous economic leverage in Afghanistan.... However, Saudi Arabia is Iran's rival not only in the Arab Middle East; it also competes with Iran over the sphere of influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran is afraid that the dialogue with the Taliban will come at its expense. Obama will have to decide very soon which of the two will be able to help more effectively in the war in Afghanistan, and mainly what the aims of the war are to be: stopping the Taliban or living with them in peace while giving up on the idea of a strong central government.

CUNNINGHAM